

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0001.06 : Tape 6**

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Location of Interview: Dharamsala, India
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Language of Interview: Tibetan
Interviewed by: Paljor Tsarong
Name: Drakten [Tib. grags bstan]
Gender: Male
Age: 57
Date of Birth: 1935

Abstract

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government who discusses in detail the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses in detail the Lhasa uprising and the fighting in Norbulinga in 1959. He describes the injuries men sustained and how the Buddhist faith was used during the fighting. He also discusses how the senriy lottery process was used to determine whether or not to stay in Norbulinga and continue fighting the Chinese.

Tape 6

A: Then a Khamba took up the bren-gun and started firing. We all had 303 English Carbines and were lined up to shoot. I did like to shoot guns too [laughs]. Then a little later, the Litang Chandzö, the bullet went through the barrel. Earlier, also, the bullet went through the barrel. So his hand was shot. It swelled so much and the hand became huge. He was hopelessly in pain. At Norbulinga, in the Shabden Lhagang, there was a medical treatment center. The doctor was Amji Anela [Tib. em ji a nan lags] and 2 or 3 others. There were quite a few people bandaging the wounded. They asked me to take him to be treated. I slowly took him up to Shabden Lhagang. It was morning, around 10. There were already about 70 odd wounded there. Our wounded, when he got there, could not even be considered as wounded. It was just the hand, right? There were those who were hit by cannons with their whole lower halves was missing or those who were just torn apart [Tib. chab be chob be], and those with their intestines spilling out. It was an unbearable sight, and they were just groaning and writhing about and the place was filled with blood. So I said I was not going in since if I got blood on me, then I could also get shot, and I told him to go in. Then I returned.

The gunfire was continuing at a fantastic rate. From Sera to the canal in the sandy area Jera [Tib. bye rag] and to the motor station, we were going to rush over the wall. From our park [Tib. gling ga] side, we planned to come out and join with those from the Jera. From around the Jera, there were some people gathered.

When the shooting began from the motor station it was almost unbearable, there was a big round gunnery unit. No one had yet attacked the gunnery unit. They were gathered there and the Sera monks came via Jera and hid in a sheltering spot. They were going from here into that spot. There were quite a lot of people there, and so they went into the park. From us, a lot of people went. They were saying, "Go now, go now. If you're going, go now." What they said before they ran was, "Now! In the name of Buddhist faith, now come if you are coming. Come, in the name of the Buddhist faith. Gyawa Tenzin Gyatso [Tib. rgyal ba bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho]" and sped across to hide in that place. That's all they said. Just one thing. "The Buddhist faith and Gyawa Tenzin Gyatso!" and shouting the name of the Dalai Lama as they ran. When it comes to death, the mind of the people was on the Buddhist faith and uttering the name of the Dalai Lama. So that's how they died and sacrificed their lives. They said, "In the name of the Buddhist faith, come along now. One, two and Gyawa Tenzin Gyatso!" My, my. So many died that way. When they got to the wall and tried to get over, there was continuous bren-gun fire from up there, so they could not get over. One could not even lift one's head. Then from the back side of the Potala, a mortar was fired. It hit the gunnery unit right on the target. What a shot! For a while it was just dead silent and from our side there was no firing. It seemed that everything was coming from that unit. The reason we couldn't budge was that from every hole in the gunnery unit there was bren-gun fire. Then they said that the cannons were firing and our people would get hit, so people withdrew. When the gunnery unit was making things unbearable, the plan was to run to the wall and then have as many people as possible go over the wall, and then fight with knives and axes. This was the real plan. They took off without any hesitation, these people.

Then through the marsh area, the retreat had begun. The people were like a string of rosaries. All the roads around the marsh were blocked. It would not have been right for us to leave. Then, around 3 at night, the soldiers who were lined up in groups joined

together. Then, like the breaking of the rosary string, there were gaps and people ran away. Our government troops were in place and so were the Lhasans. All the others were running away, you know. Then around 3, they came into Norbulinga. Most of the people, a lot of the officials, were in the Yigtsang. The place was full. There was nothing to do, so we sat. The cannons were sounding (firing), but the Yigtsang was not hit.

While we were there, Kungö Tseja Gyentsenla seemed to have gone to the Gombokhang [Protector Diety chapel] to do a senriy divination. He came with the senriy and said, "Okay, now, you all have come here, thank you. Now, this is how it is going to be. This morning there was intense firing. So, what if we go to Ramagang? What if we cross the river? Should we go to Ramagang and cross the river or is it better to stay? That was the talk that we had earlier and we agreed to do a senriy in front of the deity Gombo Yishin Norbu [Tib. mgon po yid bzhin nor bu]. I do not know what the answer is but now I am going to read it to you." The answer said that we should remain in Norbulinga. "Okay, now! The senriy said that we should stay. So now there are not two options to think about! Now it is decided that we remain. Everybody take care, take care!" Then Kungö Tarala was coming. He was, it seemed, on top of Jogpori. As his assistants, his two nephews were there. He had a pistol and so did the two nephews. Behind Kungö was a monk from the tantric school, Lama Gyüpa, who had a rifle, a long knife, and a large amulet. Then there was a soldier with a bren-gun on his shoulders who said, "I was on Jogpori firing the bren-gun. Now all the soldiers have come down. It is full of Chinese and we couldn't manage. I came to surrender the gun, so please take it." Then Kungö Tarala said, "Yes, since this morning there has been firing on Jogpori. But everybody is just sitting like this. You just can't sit like that." Kungö at this time was at the Kagögang Command center (military headquarters at Norbulinga), and it was under his to command. "Now, when the situation became uncontrollable, you must have been thinking that the government was going to surrender or that there were going to be some negotiations. Otherwise, what was the use of coming in here? They are firing outside and you should be outside returning fire. There's no use in being holed up here! We here are all practically government officials, and there seems [to be] none that we have not spoken to before. You are all ones who said that you're going to sacrifice everything. You are all ones who have already said that, so how can you just sit like that? Each one has their positions assigned, so go to them and hold them. Don't go here and there and everywhere, leaving this side empty and then that side! That's not the way. Each should stay put in one's own area. You may be thinking that there is a retreat or negotiations, but there are various ways of retreating and Jogpori is lost. So the main place to go is Ramagang. But there is no way to go to Ramagang since Jogpori is taken and they are firing the bren-guns. They won't let anyone go to Ramagang. Chinese are in Gyatso. When they shoot from there up and when they shoot from Jogpori down, the road to Ramagang is cut off. So firstly, the able-bodied people just can't sit around. If we have to move, then the elderly and the Assembly representatives can be taken across the river. The able-bodied must stay. We have to fiercely shoot and take back Jogpori. With Jogpori lost and with us just sitting down here, there is no way we can fight. We should fiercely attack Nortölinga and take it, and then we, the elderly and the representatives, can be taken to Ramagang. So now I need people to go to Jogpori and from among you let the volunteers come forth." Everyone was quiet. At first we were there on top and the Chinese climbed it. The people who were on top could not manage to hold and had come down. Now, when the Chinese were up there, naturally it would be hard to find volunteers to go up, right? So there was no one who would come forward. Everyone kept quiet. Finally Tarala said, "Okay, if there are no volunteers, then I will go. So who is going to come with me? Come, let's go! There are so many of you young ones, come on!" Still, no one answered. Then he asked, "Okay, now, so who was on Jogpori? The tsidrung Gyentsen Tashi [Tib. rgyal mtshan bkra shis] said that he was one. Then the tsidrung Lobsang Yeshela said he was the other. Then Tarala asked who were the others. They answered, no one. "So the two of you come. Since you were the guards of the place earlier, you two have to come." They said yes and got up. The two of them, Kungö Tarala, his two nephews, the monk from the tantric school, and the soldier with the bren-gun, altogether 7 people were going to take Jogpori. A white horse was loaded with two boxes of bullets and that's the way they proceeded to Jogpori. As they approached near Dekyilingka there was firing from Jogpori and they could not make any headway. In the process, his younger nephew lost his life there. So Kungö and the elder nephew were left. The two of them couldn't go up nor down to Norbulinga, so through Dekyilingka they crossed the river at Ramagang and then escaped.

In the Yigtsang at Norbulinga, the people were there as before. Then after Kungö Tarala had left, Bumtang Trunyichemmo came. He wore the robe over his head and said, "Now, there is no way you can stay like this. If you fight, then that's all you can expect. But we have already started the fight and if you don't fight properly, then you will be at a loss. Now we have to fight as fiercely as ever. We old people, we can't do anything, except when some talking is needed, we will speak. There's nothing else that can be done, the body won't go. So don't stay like this. Go to your areas and fight. And if you can't fight at all, then run away. Even if you run a life is saved. Life is important. We were born as humans, and that's precious. So run away. If you can't run, then you tsidrung don't wear a chupa and carry a gun. Take the dress off, wear your robes, hide the gun or put it some place. Then wear your robes and come into the palace. We are old, and the palace is blessed and we can just sit among the walls. Gradually they will come and when we meet them face to face, then we can talk if there is anything to talk about. So those of you who can't run, come into the palace and sit near us." Then he got up and left.

Since Bumtang said that, the tsidrung that managed to come to India, had like permission given from Bumtang and the officials began leaving Norbulinga. Each one was asking, "Shall we go?" and they were leaving. Myself, Kungö Shatsela [Tib. shar rtse lags], two servants, his servant and my partner called Jogla [Tib. lcog lags], the five (six) of us, just before dark, left via Jensei Phodrang through the marshes. When we were in the middle of the marsh, I was hit by cannon shrapnel. I didn't know at all that I was hit. While I was walking, something black was moving in my hands. I wondered what it was and looked. I had a maroon dress and it was all black. I wondered what it was, I didn't see the blood. One's body was hit by a weapon and there was not an inkling of feeling. There was so much apprehension, wading through the muddy marsh water, the other shore seemed so far and the cannons were continuously firing. It must have been from this danger, but there was no feeling on one's flesh. A shrapnel shot had hit behind my ear. On the road it gave me a lot of trouble but later it got better. My friend Kelsang Jayang [Tib. skal bzang 'jam dbyangs] was a bit further up. I called, "Kelsang Jayang, Kelsang, wait a while, I'm hit by a gun." In my mind, when I was hit I didn't know, but as I went further on with the pain, I thought that I would fall and not be able to go on. If I was to be in a condition where I could not carry on, I thought that I would let them go, give them the gun and then ask them to shoot me and not let me be. So when I called my friend, such thoughts were occurring. As I approached, Kelsang Jayang was all red. I asked him, "Jog, did you get shot? It's all red." "No, nothing has happened!" he replied. I took a look and from his sleeves the blood was dripping. I said, "Something has hit your hands, but let's go straight ahead." After wading through the marshes, we went into a house and looked.

There was a hole in Kelsang Jayang's elbow, it was smashed. He was the same, there was a hole and he did not even feel the prick of a needle. When humans have an astounding feeling of danger, the body's sense of feeling seems to go away. Even when one is shot, I think one goes and maybe there is no feeling.

So the reason I am relating all of this is this. When the cannons were fired, they fired with the absolute knowledge that he was there. That night, after we had left, they said that the Chinese had gone into Norbulinga and were searching all the rooms. They were looking for the Dalai Lama and did not find him. The next day they also came and searched everywhere, and they could not find him. They caught everyone and slowly dispatched them into the trucks. So each one was caught, sent and then they searched everywhere in Norbulinga. They searched for two days. Since they did not find the Dalai Lama, they searched all the dead bodies outside, for 3 or 4 days. They didn't look at the heads with hair, but all the shaven heads with robes or dress were turned over. They were looking for the Dalai Lama's body. They said that they fired on the people, but the random [Tib. chak rdung nyag rdung] firing of so many cannons in Norbulinga was to kill the Dalai Lama. So the danger to the Dalai Lama's life, that's how all of these incidents came about. The bomb incidents, the people were caught red-handed. What Taktse Rimpoche said was a raw rendition of what he was told at that time, straight talk, nothing made up. Let alone the Chinese taking Tibet, but if they could manipulate him and use his name, then good. If not, and he was thinking otherwise, then they were going to get rid of him and give a title to a brother and bring Tibet under their control. So their real aim, the one that came straight out, was that. So regarding the Dalai Lama's safety, these were the events which show that that was their policy decision. It was just one's good merit and the deities, religion and oracles that protected him. Actually, in Norbulinga, from an impossible escape situation, Chemmo and the others with deep perception and undertaking, the dumb had really fooled the clever this time. They say we are old fashioned (green-brained [Tib. klad pa ljang gu]), fools. The Chinese are said to be malicious and clever, like hawks, eagles and wolves [Tib. phra glag syang gsum]. This time we really put a fantastic dunce cap on them. Anyway, in this way it was possible to bring the Dalai Lama here (to India). Regarding the Dalai Lama's escape, one can really say that it was 90 percent Chemmo's doing.